

NOTES ON THE SCINCID LIZARD
***Cryptoblepharus litoralis* (Mertens, 1958) IN THE**
NORTHERN TERRITORY

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Cryptoblepharus litoralis was first recorded in the N.T. by Gow, 1981. This record was based on two specimens collected by the present author and G. Gow, from Cape Wessel Island (11°00'S 136°46'E, October 1979). Subsequent field work along the Arnhem Land coast by the author, has shown that the species is present on both New Year Island (10°55'S 133°02'E) and Oxley Island (10°59'S 132°50'E). These records extend the species distribution westwards, almost to Croker Island (figure 1). The skink was previously known only from the coastal fringes of northeastern Queensland, Torres Strait Islands and New Guinea.

The genus *Cryptoblepharus* is composed of active, diurnal lizards which are normally arboreal or saxicoline in habit. The lower eyelid is fused to the upper, leaving the eye covered by a transparent disc. This character gives the genus its vernacular name of 'Snake-eyed skinks'. *Cryptoblepharus litoralis* is a large, dark coloured species, which is known from a variety of habitats in the supralittoral (foreshore) zone. Of the eight N.T. specimens collected, only the specimen from New Year Island was found amongst beach debris. Other specimens were active on or around rock outcrops, close to the water's edge.

Observations on the behaviour of *C. litoralis* from Oxley Island provided interesting results. They are agile, fast moving animals which, in a suitable habitat, tend to congregate in small groups. Several specimens were observed foraging amongst rocks in the intertidal zone, one of which, upon collection, disgorged a polychaete worm of the family *Nereidae*. Cogger (1983) lists their usual diet as amphipods and other small marine animals. When confronted by an incoming tide the lizards retreated to the fringing vegetation. However, a few specimens were observed on rocks completely surrounded by water. When cornered these animals leaped into the sea and rapidly swam to the shore or another rock. I consider this to be atypical behaviour, as it would possibly leave them susceptible to predation by fishes.

The N.T. specimens showed little variation in morphological characters when compared to a similar sized sample from northeastern Queensland (table 1).

There are slight differences between the two populations, specifically in the mid body scale count and the number of lamellae under the fourth toe. These two characters were compared for similarities or differences between the two populations, using a Mann Whitney U-test. The results indicate that there are significant differences between N.T. and Qld. specimens.

Cryptoblepharus litoralis is generally characterised by its foreshore dwelling habits, but other species of *Cryptoblepharus* also may be found in close proximity to the shore. Table 2 lists some of the taxonomic characters which may be used to differentiate N.T. species of *Cryptoblepharus*.

Material examined:

N.T. Museum: R7761-62 Cape Wessel I.; R10905 New Year I.; R10923-27 Oxley I.
 Qld Museum: J20434-35 Lizard I.; J25448-49 Johnstone River; J27680 Magnetic I.;
 J32562-63 Townsville; J32565 Magnetic I.

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References

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 GOW, G.F. (1981) Checklist of Reptiles and Amphibians of the Northern sector of the N.T., N.T. Naturalist No. 4.

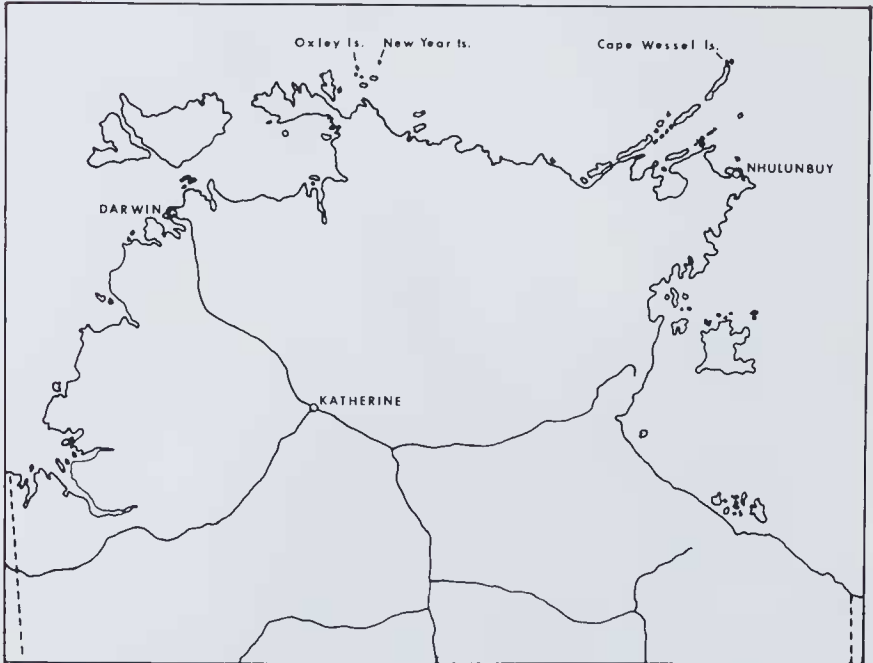
**Table 1: COMPARISON OF BODY PROPORTIONS
 AND SCALE COUNTS OF *Cryptoblepharus litoralis* IN THE N.T. AND QLD.**

| Feature | N.T. n=8 | Qld. n=8 |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| hindlimb length, % SVL | 38.6–52.6 mean = 44.1 | 41.5–46.7 mean = 43.8 |
| axilla to groin length, % SVL | 43.5–54.9 mean = 50.3 | 48.3–57.6 mean = 53.0 |
| forelimb to snout length, % SVL | 35.3–45.1 mean = 39.3 | 35.6–40.0 mean = 37.8 |
| mid body scale rows | 27–30 mean = 28.1 | 26–27 mean = 26.3 |
| paravertebral scale rows | 49–56 mean = 51.9 | 49–55 mean = 51.6 |
| no. of lamellae under 4th toe | 17–19 mean = 18.1 | 19–24 mean = 20.6 |

Table 2: COMPARISON OF SOME MORPHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS OF N.T. MEMBERS OF THE GENUS *Cryptoblepharus*

| species | subdigital lamellae | lower surfaces of hands & feet | number of supraciliary scales | max. snout/vent. length |
|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>carnabyi</i> | finely keeled | whitish | 5 | 40 mm |
| <i>litoralis</i> | smooth | black | 5 | 55 mm |
| <i>megastictus</i> | smooth | whitish | 6, rarely 5 | 40 mm |
| <i>plagiocephalus</i> | smooth | light brown/whitish | 6, rarely 5 | 47 mm |

FIGURE 1: MAP SHOWING THE N.T. ISLANDS WHERE *Cryptoblepharus litoralis* HAS BEEN RECORDED



Figures 3 and 4: *Cryptoblepharus litoralis* — N.T.M. R7762, from Cape Wessel Island, N.T. Scale in mm.

